CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BAD BOYFRIEND,
THE FLATTERER AND THE SYKOPHANT:
RELATED FORMS OF THE KAKOS IN
DEMOCRATIC ATHENS

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1. Introduction

This chapter has three sections, all of which seek to bring into closer association the three abusive character stereotypes of my title,1 vituperatively designating individuals as (a) a pornos (‘male whore’), euruprōktos (‘wide-arse’), katapugón (‘up the arse’) or other label for an immoral boyfriend (‘erômenos’) of an older man; (b) a kolax or other label (such as episitios, ‘food-earner’, gelîtopoios or bômolokhos, ‘jester’,2 and in the fourth

1 Two of them (lovers and flatterers) are combined already in the title of Scholtz 2004, applied to the relations between Paphlagon, the Sausage-Seller, and Demos in Knights. Some signs of these connections can be found also in Carey 1994, Sommerstein 1996, and Davidson 1997, 267–277.

2 The origins of the terms parasitos and bômolokhos are interesting. Parasitai were cult-officials with set dining rights at certain sanctuaries (see above all Athen. 234d–235e, with Davies 1996, 634–637 and 2000), and bômolokhoi were marginal characters who frequented altars, seeking shamelessly through flattery, deceit or theft to get illicit shares of sacrificial food and drink (e.g. Harpocr. p. 76, 9, Pherecrates, fr. 159 KA, Ar. Eq. 902, 1194, with the important treatment by Frontisi-Ducroux 1984). Bômolokhoi then became those who made vulgar or incessant jokes or generally fooled around, often as a means of acquiring shares in food and drink, and parasites was used as a more general term for such flatterers, hangers-on and food scroungers. This suggests a strong parallelism seen between cultic or civic feasts and less public sumposia (Schmitt-Pantel 1992), and we may note that officials at Athens called aiōptai (‘wine-choosers’) had responsibilities for ensuring appropriate shares of wine and access to lighting for the participants at certain festival feasts (the Apaturia, and probably others as well), and others called protenthai (tasters) operated also at the Apaturia and perhaps others (see Eup. fr. 219 KA, Athen. 171d, 425a–b, and cf. Fisher 2000, 372 and n. 75). They seem well established, perhaps archaic, and one can compare the officials already in place in late-seventh or early-sixth-century Tiryns to regulate civic feasting, the platiwoinarchoi (SEG 30. 380).
century *parasitos*) for flatterer or toady; or (c) a *sukophantês*, one involved in legal operations for the wrong motives. First I shall suggest that such characters were all seen as threats to the moral values of the city and the cohesive running of its institutions because of the moral perception that all these *kakoi* offended against standards of reciprocity which were shared strongly across all Athenian social classes, and are not to be seen as ‘elite values’ (section 2). Second, I shall argue that a key to understanding the prevalence of such bogey figures in the Athenian collective imaginary from at least the period of the Archidamian War lies in the effects of the post-Cleisthenic institutions which encouraged much wider participation, both in direct democratic politics and in collectively organized festivals and other leisure activities (section 3). Finally, I shall suggest that these specific moral concerns found expression in a series of legislative changes from the second half of the fifth century to the beginning of the fourth century BCE (section 4).

These three types of derogatory labels in particular have two things in common: first, they were hard to define, because they imputed behavior which crossed vague and contested boundaries; and second, they were very often attached in this period to the same individuals, a group of young newcomers to the world of the social and political elites, who were popularly supposed to be prepared to threaten or break moral protocols in order to share in the political and social lives of the elite. This also helps to explain why terms such as whore, flatterer, and sykophant were used for the representation of relations in comedy between leading politicians and the collective *dêmos* (itself a negative inversion of the positive idea in Pericles’ Funeral Speech that the citizens should be *erastai* of their city). But whereas much recent work (e.g. Wohl 2002, Rosenbloom 2003, 2004, Scholtz 2004) focuses on the treatment of the ‘demagogues’ as flatterers and sykophants, who professed their ‘love’ for the *dêmos*, I am interested here in asking slightly different questions: first, why so many minor political figures, *kômôidoumenoi* we know less about, were often represented as current

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3 I use sykophant with a *k* to indicate the Greek term *sukophantês*, as distinct from the English ‘sycophant’, which has come (from the late sixteenth century according to the *OED*) to be used most often in the sense of the Greek *kolax*: the dual usage may reflect a continuing view that similarly unscrupulous and devious forms of behavior are involved in both, and the shift towards ‘gross flattery’ may reflect a feeling that deceitful accusations were more often made at a royal or noble court than in a law court.

4 On the ideals of erotic reciprocity expressed in this idea, see especially Monoson 2000, 64–87, Wohl 2002, 30–72.